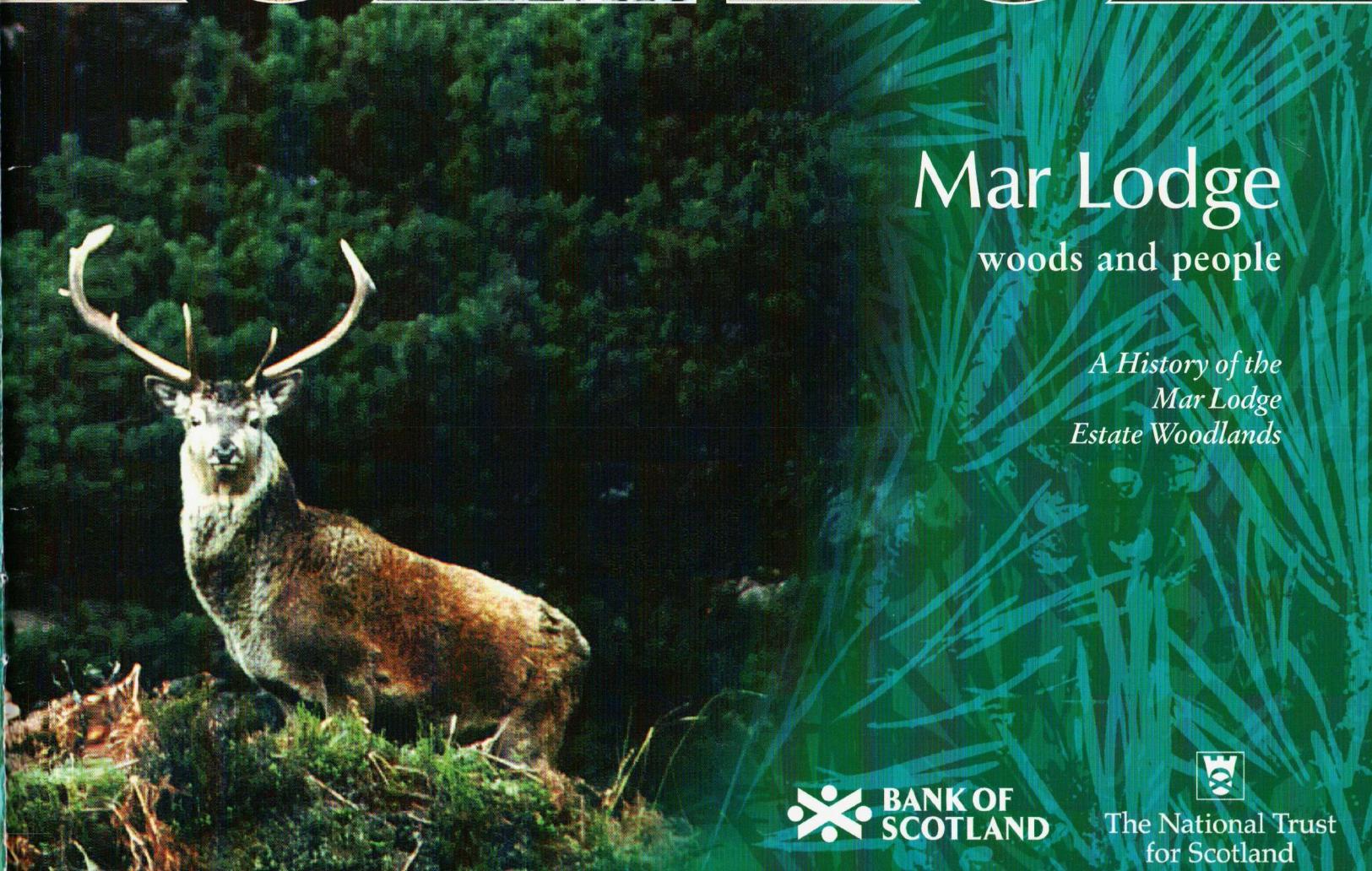




Mar Lodge

woods and people

*A History of the
Mar Lodge
Estate Woodlands*



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Text by Fiona Watson and Mairi Stewart, AHRB Research Centre for Environmental History, Stirling University.

Illustrations, maps and photographs

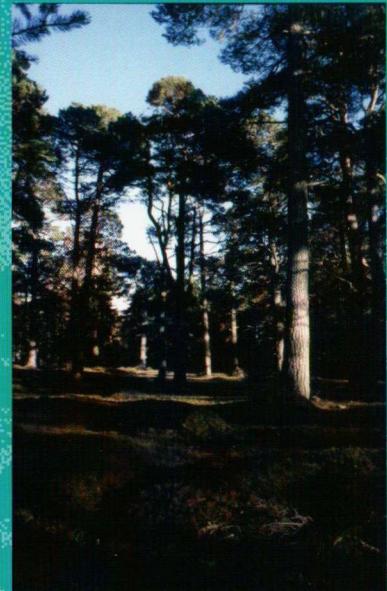
1	National Museums of Scotland trustees
2	Glyn Satterley
3, 5, 6, 15, 21, 23, 42, 43	Peter Holden
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1



2



3

'To stand in them is to feel the past'. So wrote the authors of *The Native Pinewoods of Scotland*. Today visitors come to marvel at the natural wonders to be found within Mar Lodge Estate, now under the care of The National Trust for Scotland. Away from the car parks, it is possible, on a warm spring day with snow still lying in the high passes to Atholl, Strathspey and Badenoch, to find yourself completely alone in one of Mar's remnant Caledonian pinewoods.

Find a quiet spot beneath one of the ancient pines, lie down on a bed of springy blaeberry, forget you are in the twenty-first century, pause and consider. It's almost possible to 'feel' the past. A herd of red deer dashing through the woods hounded by the King, his noble companions and an army of followers. Children laughing and running down through the woods as they follow their parents returning from the high shielings with their fattened cattle. Men shouting to each other as they desperately try to control logs plunging through the linns on their way to a nearby sawmill. The steady thud of axes from dawn till dusk and the tearing of branches as giant trees crash to the ground. The clatter of a sturdy polished carriage filled with chattering ladies. Further up the Glen shots ring out, the hunters cry triumphantly and horses patiently clop by with the day's quarry. Marching feet and the lilt of the New Brunswick woodsmen returning from a hard day in the woods, doing their bit for the war effort.

You can imagine all this clatter and clamour in your quiet woodland glade because nothing is around to disturb you from your daydream. The peace and tranquillity of Mar Lodge Estate are highly prized by those who visit, but it was not always like that!

Introduction

*To stand in them
is to feel the past*



4 A cock capercaillie displaying.



5

The woods and their wildlife

Five o'clock in the morning in late April, as the light is strengthening. Suddenly a sound like a cork popping cuts through the damp, early morning air. A cock capercaillie, moving slowly and purposefully, head up, turkey-tail fanned, patrols a clearing in the Mar woods. The hen birds look on.

This breeding ritual was first acted out in the Mar pinewoods over 8000 years ago. Passed on through generations, an ancient display in an ancient place. But the capercaillie, the world's largest grouse, has had to fight for survival in recent centuries. By the 1770s it had effectively disappeared from Scotland. It was reintroduced in the nineteenth century, but is once more threatened with extinction.

The capercaillie's misfortune mirrors the story of the Caledonian pinewoods. Once a haven for wildlife, they now cover a fraction of their original area. Despite being reduced to small pockets, the Mar woods are still home to many plants and animals, each with a place in the scheme of things. They survive as a shadow of their former extent, a result not just of human activity, but also of our ever-changing climate.

Today in these woods, the graceful Scots pine predominates, but look out for other native trees, such as birch, rowan, alder, willow and aspen. The woodland floor, carpeted with blaeberry, mosses and heather, is also home to more delicate flowers. Chickweed wintergreen, a pretty white flower, is abundant in early summer. Careful inspection may also reveal some special pinewood residents like the delicate, but rare, twinflower.

Among the many insects to be found, wood ants in their millions are perhaps the most abundant. Their anthills house huge colonies and can grow to several feet high, though to the untrained eye they often look like a pile of pine needles. The needles form the roof, protecting the ant city below and also acting as a solar panel. Early summer warmth brings anthills to life, a seething mass in dry weather, with speeding columns radiating out in search of food and building materials to maintain their home.

You might catch a glimpse of a red squirrel, devouring its favourite Scots pine seeds. If you see discarded cone cores below a tree, or on a stump, that's a sure sign that a busy squirrel has been at work. Scottish crossbills also eat pine seeds, bills adapted to prise open cones and a long tongue to pick out seeds.

Birds of prey, such as buzzard and golden eagle, are also at home around these woods. Buzzards can often be seen soaring on broad wings, superbly adapted to ride rising air

After the ice



Around 12,000 years ago Scotland slowly began to emerge from the frozen grip of the last Ice Age. Temperatures rose dramatically, the ice started to melt, and life returned. Within a few thousand years, the seeds of the first trees gradually took root. Birch was the first, followed by hazel, with elm, Scots pine and oak arriving around 8500 years ago.

This extensive forest was no place for the great beasts of the icy tundra – such as mammoth, bison, giant fallow deer, reindeer – and they began to die out. New animals more at home among trees – red and roe deer, wild boar, elk, and smaller creatures such as voles, shrews and red squirrels – eagerly took their places. This was the ancient Caledonian forest, full of life from the tiniest microbe to the tallest tree.

People arrived in Scotland about 10,000 years ago. They stuck mainly to the coasts, travelling by canoes hollowed out of logs, living off the fruits of the sea and the forests. But slowly, over thousands of years, the early inhabitants of these islands adapted their hunting-gathering-fishing routine to include farming. About 6000 years ago they finally gave up the nomadic lifestyle and settled down in one place.

These early farmers needed a lot of land for agriculture, so they began to make larger clearings in the forest. It's quite possible that this caused the greatest reduction in Scotland's woodland cover. Hunting, once a necessity of life, became a way of relaxing and showing off for the top members of society. Particularly good hunting areas – like the woods of Mar – were set aside for the select few. Even so, everyone else needed the woods too – as shelter for livestock, and as timber for just about everything. Trees were fundamental to the lives of Scotland's people, whether at work or at play, officially or unofficially.



11 The ruins of Kindrochit castle, Braemar, with the Fife Arms Hotel behind. The castle played host to many a hunting party whose guests might include the King of Scots himself.

The Earldom of Mar and its forests

If people lived on the banks of the River Dee west of the village of Braemar in the centuries before the formation of the kingdom of Scotland, there is no evidence for it now. But it's likely that, by AD 1000, the **Forest** of Mar had echoed to the sound of the hunt for many centuries already.

The earldom of Mar, situated between the rivers Dee and Don west of Aberdeen, was the remnant of an ancient Pictish mini-kingdom. As descendants of a Pictish leader, the Earls of Mar were among the most senior nobles in the kingdom. The Earls' loyalty to the Scottish crown was rewarded with almost complete control over their large territories, including their inhabitants and natural resources. Nevertheless, the dependence of people on the woods for so much of their everyday needs continued, whatever the Earl might say from a strictly legal point of view.

The Earls' main residence for much of the middle ages was further north, at Kildrummy on Donside. Although they did not often visit upper Deeside, when they did, they took full advantage of the splendid hunting to be had in the Forest of Mar.

A royal connection

Such bountiful woodlands entertained many guests, including Kings, in fine style, with animals such as deer, hare and grouse all for the taking. Apparently the Earls of Mar:

held hunting entertainments here of a magnificence and splendour perfectly indescribable. There were the Highland kerns (warriors) in hundreds and tens of

Forests

The word 'forest' didn't originally mean an area of woodland, but a hunting reserve. However, we can usually assume that trees formed part of a forest, because they provided food and shelter for the deer and game. Forests had their own laws (written down by the Normans but probably much older) which defined who could hunt in them and take away living timber and bracken for building, for example. Though they weren't supposed to kill deer, many farmers had the right to pasture animals in the forest at certain designated times of the year, so long as they followed regulations designed to minimise disturbance to the deer. The Forest of Mar is thus the designated hunting area, as opposed to the woodlands of Mar which include the areas of trees both within and without the Forest.



2 Hunting was not just a pastime for the rich but a source of employment for local people.



hundreds - nobles, and earls, and great men, by the dozens - brave ladies gaily apparell'd - and amidst them all there rode, like a King, the Earl of Mar himself, whilst ever the trumpets were blowing, the bagpipes screaming, the hounds yelling, and the kernes shouting, till the whole vast glen rung again!

(James Brown, *The New Deeside Guide*).

The arrival of a hunting party was surely a time of great excitement and activity, especially if the King was also a guest. Catering for all these lords and ladies, plus their servants, would give plenty of work to local people who would help to drive the deer towards the hunters (especially the King or the Earl) and clear up afterwards. Those in the castle's kitchens would then swing into action to prepare the catch for a most splendid dinner.

The ancient line of Earls of Mar died out in 1374, but a royal connection with the Forest continued, ensuring that important visitors continued to spend time there. For a while the Crown decided to run the earldom directly - James II (1437-60), for example, used the Forest as a run for wild horses. But in 1565 the earldom, including the very valuable hunting reserve in the Forest of Mar, was granted by Mary, Queen of Scots to a distant relative of the original Mar family, John, Lord Erskine.

The people of Mar

It can't have been very easy living in these inhospitable Highland glens. There is little good land for cultivation, the winters can be harsh and the Dee and its tributaries are prone to highly destructive floods. But people certainly lived there. By 1451, when the rents for the earldom are first recorded, there were already settlements at Inverey, Dalmore, Allanaquoich, Easter Allanaquoich and Cragan (see map on inside back cover).

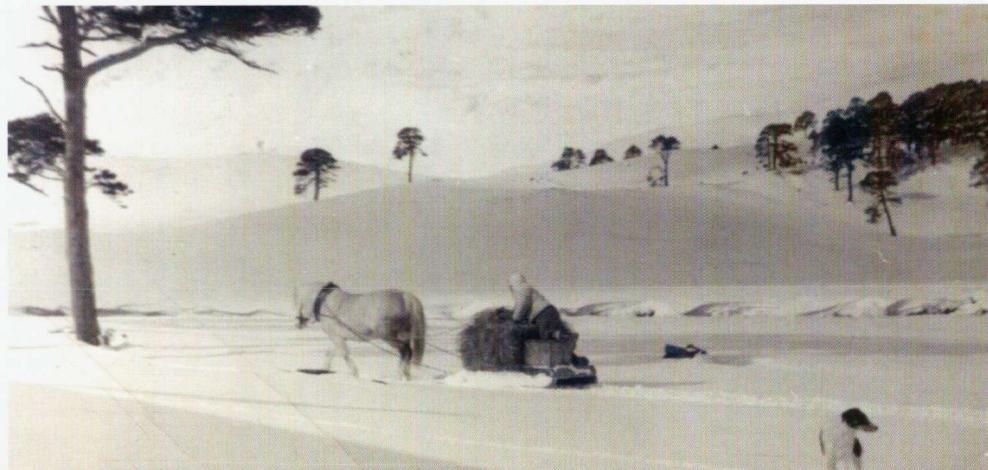
The Deeside part of the earldom was managed for the Earl by a number of estate officers, many of whom were also the main tenants on the estate. The MacKenzies of Dalmore, for example, were his foresters, though this job was as much about deer as trees. In theory these important local men were ideally placed to keep an eye on things and take action if necessary. Of course, sometimes they might also run things their way, rather than the way the Earl intended, if proper checks weren't made on their activities. This might include making use of the woods, and everything in them, in ways they weren't supposed to.

Forest laws in action

The most effective way to control what happened on an estate in Scotland before the Jacobite risings of 1745-6 was through the barony courts. Each estate was divided into much smaller units – baronies – and each had its own court. Roughly once a year a senior estate officer sat with a jury drawn from among the main tenants in the area to judge whether other local folk had been going about their business according to estate regulations. The first reference to barony courts for Mar dates from 1592 when it was declared theft for anyone to cut timber or take green (living) wood. Looking after the trees was one of the main concerns of these courts and shows just how seriously estate owners took their protection, presumably because trees were so important to everyone's lives.

The main reason for the Earl of Mar's concern for his woods was because they provided shelter and grazing for deer, which he was still hunting in style. The English traveller, Thomas Pennant, recorded that in 1618 one such event required the services of between 500 and 600 men to channel the deer into a previously selected spot. There the gentlemen of the hunt stood waiting with bows, arquebus (early firearm) and muskets. Presumably large numbers of deer were killed by this method.

Nevertheless, the Mar tenants were used to pasturing their animals in the surrounding woods. A deed of 1696 that wasn't actually put into operation would have given the tenant the right to pasture a hundred cattle and eight mares in the forest of Corryvron and to build **shielings** there. So long as the Earls were able to enjoy a good hunt, there was no reason to stop the tenants from looking after their own needs. Nevertheless, such a 'hands-off' approach could cause problems if the number of people increased beyond the ability of the land, and the woods, to sustain them and their animals.



Shielings

Traditionally livestock was moved onto higher pastures between 26 May and 26 August. The people that went with them stayed in small semi-permanent huts called shielings for several months. These shielings were sometimes built in woods where the trees and the grass underneath them would provide sustenance for the animals.

10

Winter in Luibeg Deeside may be beautiful but it has not always been easy to make a living here.



14

A map of the Forest of Mar Survey'd and done by John Farquharson of Invercald: in Anno 1703. This map gives some impression of the extent of woodland cover along the Dee itself, and also up the Water of Quoich towards Beachan and in Glens Derry and Luibeg.

By the eighteenth century, tenants were settled up in Glen Dee and Glen Ey, and shielings had been constructed in Glen Lui in the Forest of Mar itself. These were by no means small communities. At Dalmore, Kenneth Mackenzie presided over his own family, nine tenants and their families, two weavers, a miller, three tradesmen and a cottar (who only rented a house with a small amount of land) – that's twenty-seven adults. They all needed wood for their houses, farm implements, household utensils and shelter for their beasts. Perhaps some ready cash might even be made from selling timber.

A commercial start

Just because a wood was well-established and extensive didn't mean that it was commercially viable. Pine timber is generally tall and bulky. Its value in the past lay as a construction timber, producing beams, deals (planks) and spars (poles). Lochs and rivers were crucial for transporting this timber to the burghs that fringed the Highlands (where the pine grew naturally), or further afield, since roads were usually either of very poor quality or non-existent.

Then, as now, native pine timber usually couldn't compete with foreign imports. Baltic countries with vast forests could easily furnish Scottish demand for good construction timber – even Highland landowners often 'shopped abroad' when constructing their stately piles. Nevertheless, Highland pine was sold where it could be transported easily and cheaply.

Although the Forest of Mar was still primarily a hunting reserve, the seventeenth century marked a new era as the commercial exploitation of the estate woods began to look both possible and desirable.

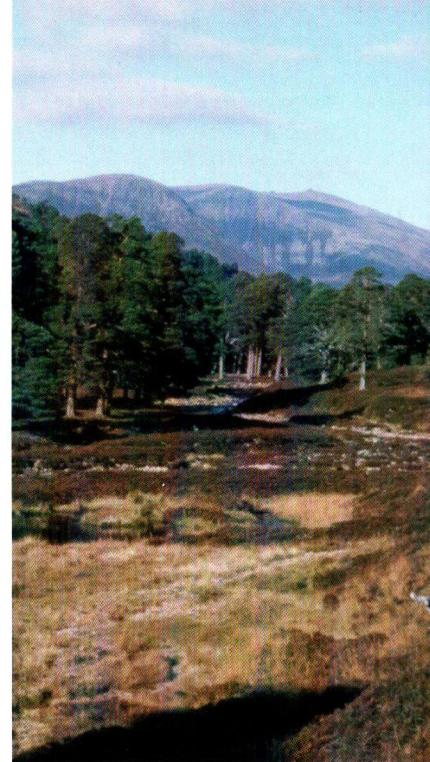
Aberdeen, some sixty miles eastwards down the River Dee, was an important Scottish market. As the port for a large resource-rich hinterland and sufficiently distant from Edinburgh to maintain independent trading links with the Continent, Aberdeen was near enough to Mar to make it worthwhile trying to sell timber there. According to a report written probably in the 1770s:

the Earls of Mar and their successors since 1632 have been in constant practice to fell, manufacture, float and give away the fir [the Scots word for pine] woods.

Unfortunately, the seventeenth century was a time of particular political unrest and, in 1689/90, the Earl of Mar's lands and houses suffered at the hands of the Jacobites (see below), putting his sawmills out of action for four years. However, they weren't stopped for long and in 1695 we have the first references to specific sawmills – one in the wood of Derry and another one planned for the woods in Glen Quoich.

The sawmills were intended to be put to good use. An early reference to a contract to cut the Mar woods in 1711 specified that 6000 trees were to be cut annually for thirty-one years. This would indicate that there was a considerable amount of decent-sized timber in the Mar woods, though nothing is said as yet about its quality.

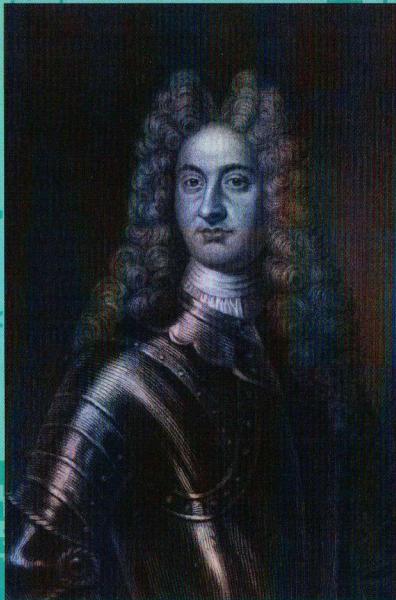
So, from the seventeenth century, the woods in the Forest of Mar and elsewhere on the estate had come to serve three main purposes: as a hunting reserve where other uses were regulated, in theory at least; as a place where the local tenants could pasture livestock and collect timber for a variety of domestic purposes; and now as a supply of commercial timber to be sent for sale in Aberdeen and elsewhere.



15 *The Glen Derry woods, where a sawmill operated from at least 1695.*



16 *The original sawmills were water-powered, to be replaced by oil power in the twentieth century.*



17 John Erskine, 6th Earl of Mar,
leader of the 1715 Jacobite rebellion.
He was known as 'bobbin' John for
the fickleness of his political
allegiances.

The end of an era and a new broom

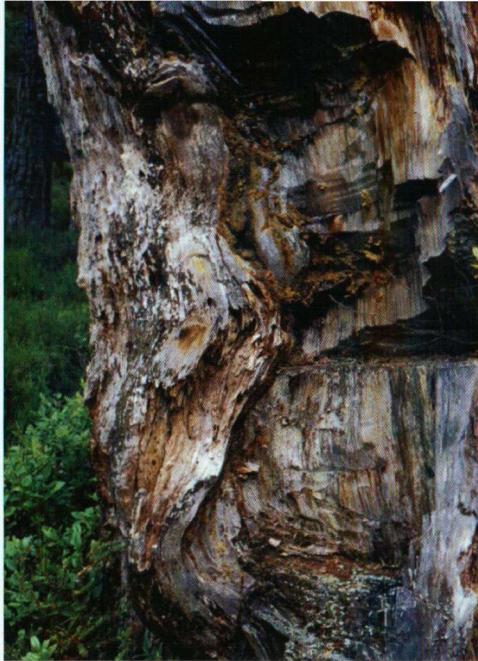
By 1715 the Erskines had held Mar for over 150 years. But as leader of the **Jacobite** rising of that year, John Erskine, 6th Earl of Mar, lost his lands. In 1724 Mar Estate (the Deeside part of the earldom) was sold to the Earl's brother, Lord Grange, and another relation, Lord Dun. Finally, in 1735, it was sold to a wealthy Aberdeenshire entrepreneur, William Duff, Lord Braco of Kilbryde, Cavan, Ireland. It was the end of an era.

If Lords Grange and Duff felt an emotional attachment to the Mar estate and its people, they certainly didn't let that get in the way of making the most out of it financially. Perhaps it was a clash of cultures. They were landowners in the south-east and used to the 'improving' practices that were already becoming standard in the south. As they saw it, they could not condone the lax traditions that seemed to allow the tenants to use the estate's natural resources, particularly its woods, more or less at will. As far as the tenants were concerned, they had always had the right to take timber for their buildings and couldn't do without it.

In 1725 the new owners issued the first of many sets of regulations. They were particularly concerned about the pinewoods and wanted to stop practices such as cutting out **candle fir** and **muirburn**, which could so easily get out of control. They also tried to restrict their tenants' timber entitlement by specifying the uses to which this **servitude** timber could be put. This suspicion of local activities even extended to the important tenant families who had traditionally managed the estate for the Earls.

Jacobitism

The term comes from the Latin word for James, *Jacobus*. King James (VII of Scotland and II of England) Stuart was removed from his thrones in 1688 (England) and 1689 (Scotland), to be replaced by William, Prince of Orange and his wife, Mary, who was James's daughter. Over the next fifty-five years Jacobitism, which aimed to restore the Stuarts from exile in Europe, attracted a wide range of supporters, particularly in Scotland. Jacobites were not necessarily highlanders – anti-government feeling, particularly after the parliamentary union with England in 1707, was one of the biggest factors in its early stages.



18

A pine tree showing signs of past cutting for 'candle fir'.

Candle fir: chunks of the combustible inner part of the tree cut out for use as lighting. Unfortunately this doesn't do the rest of the tree much good.

The Mackenzies and the timber trade

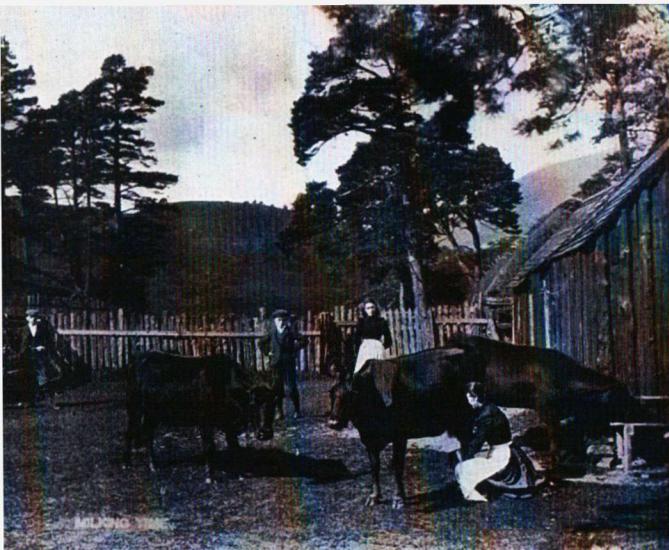
The Mackenzies of Dalmore had been Mar foresters since the fifteenth century, probably wielding a significant level of control not just over the woods but also the hill grazings, which were important to locals and cattle drovers. The family was clearly involved in buying and selling timber and may have been running woodland operations for many years for the benefit of the Earls and themselves.

In the twenty years following the forfeiture of the estate in 1716, a 'turf war' seems to have broken out over control of various parts of it. How well the Mackenzies had ever got on with the numerous, neighbouring Farquharson families is not entirely clear. However, we get a flavour of the jostling for position from a letter written by Mackenzie to an Edinburgh lawyer in 1731. Donald Mackenzie, it seems, was 'resolved to purchase the forest of Mar to prevent the [Farquharson] laird of Invercauld from purchasing it'. This had followed years of disputes over the Forest of Mar and abuses to the woods, allegedly as a result of illegal cutting and cattle grazing.

Donald Mackenzie of Dalmore bought the pinewoods of Derry and Luibeg in 1730, entitling him to cut the woods 'of Derry and Luibeg in Braemar above the laboured land ... in Glen Lui on both sides of the water'. In 1746, however, his family sold their Dalmore lands to Lord Braco, to whom they owed money. A determined campaign to put the estate onto a proper footing, including strict adherence to regulations past and present, had caught both Dalmore and his tenants in various illegal activities.

Muirburn: another traditional practice that involved burning the heather to promote new growth. Acts of the Scottish parliament had stipulated for centuries that it should be done between 29 November and 31 March and no nearer than 300 ells (c.3500 feet) from living pine, but this didn't always happen. In 1785 the Baron Bailie court at Mar Lodge stipulated that muirburn was to take place between 2 November and 12 April, with a penalty of 40 shillings for a first offence, £5 for a second offence and £10 for a third offence.

Servitudes: legal arrangement attached to a piece of land limiting the owner's use of it or allowing others to exercise particular rights over it. This could include access by tenants to timber, but under strict control and for specific purposes.



19 Shielings for summer grazing in the glen in the eighteenth century were either tolerated or disapproved of by the estate's managers, depending on how lucrative the black cattle trade was at the time.

Gamekeepers and estate workers living in Glen Luibeg a century later kept at least one cow for dairy products.

20 Luibeg cottages in the nineteenth century.

Indeed it was Dalmore's tenants who had built their shielings in Glen Lui at some point before 1703. In 1726 they were told to remove them, because their original construction had never been formally approved by the Earl of Mar. However, the real reason for wanting a people and animal-free Forest, according to estate correspondence, was 'that the land may be ordered so as is proper for the carrying on the improvement and sale of the timber'. A few years later a list of the agreed number of animals to be pastured in the Forest of Mar was published. Lords Grange and Dun were clearly determined to get to grips with every aspect of estate life and, as they saw it, tenants were not going to be able to do exactly as they pleased any more.

Perhaps the Dalmore Mackenzies, who lived nearest to the Forest, were most guilty of ignoring estate regulations because they'd found it easiest to get away with it in the past. But this did not equip them very well to adapt to changes in management. Their rivals, the Farquharsons, fared better, gaining control of Invercauld and Inverey. With the arrival of Lord Braco (later made 1st Earl of Fife), the desire for strict and effective management continued. The Mackenzie name does not disappear completely from the area, but their power was much reduced.



The new regime – Lord Braco and the Earls of Fife

Lord Braco wasted no time in marking the acquisition of his splendid new Deeside estate with the construction of a suitable residence for his trips there. His first hunting lodge, Dalmore House, was a modest affair – only two storeys high with three bays and attendant wings. It was extended to include another storey between 1789 and 1792.

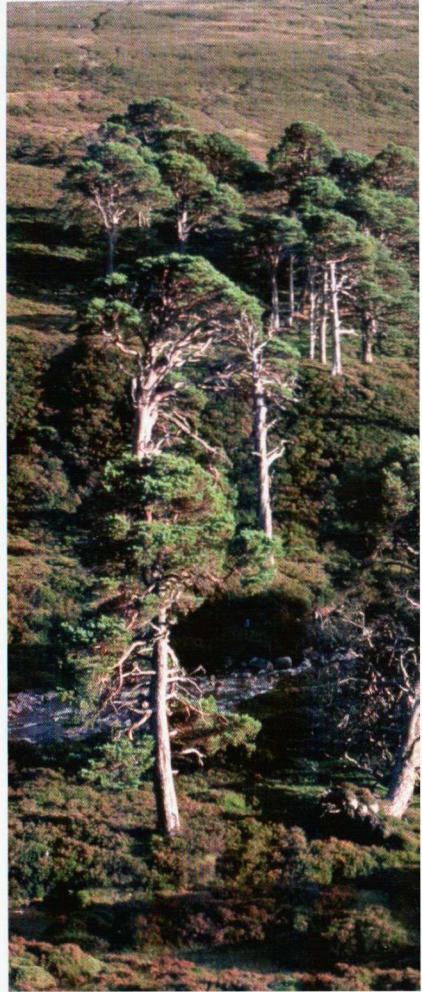
One of the most important elements of Lord Braco's purchase was the ultimate ownership of the Mar lordship, excluding what was already sold off to John Farquharson of Invercauld. This made him the legal owner of the Forest of Mar, with the accompanying right to shoot deer there. If Lord Braco had purchased this ancient estate in order to improve his social standing then clearly it worked, because in 1759 he was created Earl of Fife and Viscount MacDuff.

Nevertheless, he remained an entrepreneur at heart and was particularly keen to profit from his woods. His first act as estate owner in 1735 was to order a survey to assess their value, apart from the woods of Glen Lui which, as we've seen, had already been purchased by Mackenzie of Dalmore. Only those trees above seven inches square – an appropriate size to be sold – were considered.

The best trees were found in Badiness (see map on inside back cover): 4580 trees were valued there at £400 sterling. The trees in Derry were worth only two-thirds as much. In the Dubh Glen north-west of the top of Glen Quoich there was 'good old wood which must be manufactured by handsaws', while in the Beachan (upper Glen Quoich) there was 'a great deal of good timber and young thriving wood not for cutting'.

Like Lords Grange and Dun, Lord Braco believed that, to make the most of the potential return from the timber, he had to ensure that his tenants did not make a mess of it. So as well as restating some of the 1725 regulations, he also stipulated that if they needed timber for their buildings (as they inevitably would), they were to apply in writing to the baillie, stating what they wanted it for.

But the tenants felt strongly that they had always had the right to take enough timber for general maintenance. Interestingly, and most unusually in highland history, they were found to be right. In 1747, presumably after some robust complaining, the court ruled that the tenants in the lordship of Mar had always had the right to take timber for their buildings 'past memory of man'. So just because an estate's owner decreed that certain things should happen, didn't automatically mean that they did.



21 Beachan wood may be a scattered remnant today but in 1735 it was full of 'good timber'.



22 Braemar castle, whose garrison had ready cash for buying the produce of the glen.



16

Of course, exploiting timber wasn't the only option open to Lord Braco for making money. The sale of black cattle to England was in its heyday so, ironically, it was also in his interests to allow more grazing in the woods. The tenants with the cattle would take all the risks but their success would mean increased returns to Lord Braco through rising rents. So, despite the earlier clearing of the shielings in Glen Lui, Lord Braco allowed four new ones to be built there in 1739. The laws of the market dictated many of the trends on the Mar estate, as elsewhere. However, by the 1750s timber was again considered a profitable concern and Lord Braco was 'fully determined neither to spare trouble nor expense for discouraging the pernicious practice of stealing or destroying my woods and for obtaining all transgressors to be severely punished'.

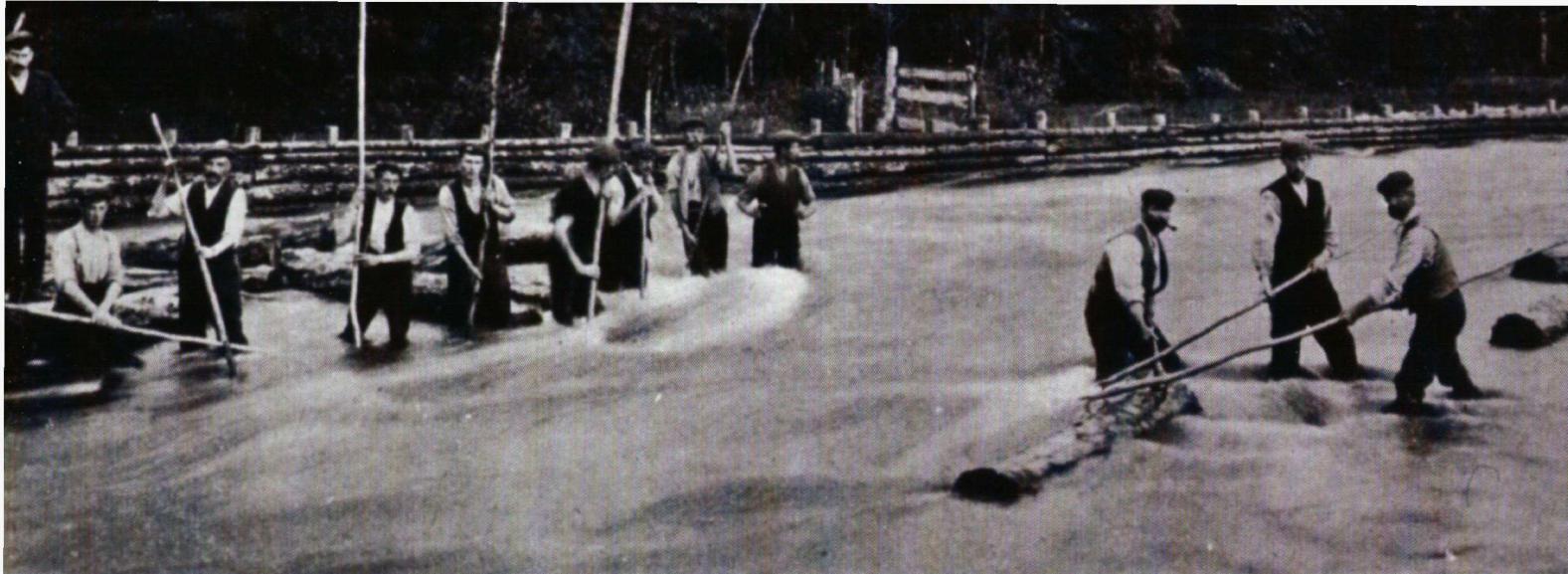
Selling timber and the sawmills

Pine was the main commercial tree, but birch and sometimes alder were also sold. During the eighteenth century, the new owners seem to have adopted several different approaches to selling timber. They don't seem to have been sure which approach would yield the most profit. Should they sell the trees standing in the wood to merchants, passing on the risk of transporting and milling them, or should they float the logs down the Dee before selling them? The last option might yield a greater price, but they might lose trees – and therefore profit – on the way. They could also mill them at their own sawmills and then sell the planks and boards. At different times all these options seem to have been put into practice.

The Mackenzies of Dalmore may have lost out, but other locals were eager to take their place and profit as wood dealers. In the 1760s, a Speyside laird's adviser came over to see what the Deeside lairds were doing with their woods. He reported that '... many of Lord Fife's tenants here spend a great deal of Summer in buying at the Woods large Boards manufactured and carrying them to Angus etc. and there selling them'.

He went on to suggest that 'they spend too much time on this and neglect Agriculture'. Local men were used to trading goods, particularly with neighbouring Angus, the Mearns and Perthshire (as opposed to the big merchants using Aberdeen). But wood was not the only commodity to bring in cash. The country folk distilled their own whisky and sold it in bulk long after it became illegal. Indeed, with a garrison of soldiers at Braemar castle for most of the 1700s, they had ready and thirsty customers.

By the end of the eighteenth century, as many as four sawmills may have operated at any one time. But that doesn't mean that these operations were highly profitable or that the sawmills were producing large amounts of timber for sale beyond the locality. Today it might take



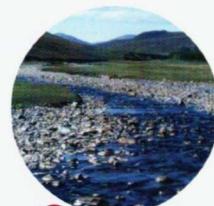
only a few weeks to clearfell a hillside wood using colossal harvesting machines, but without mechanical assistance that same hillside would take years to clear. There was also considerable local demand, given that over 2500 people lived within the parish (Braemar and Crathie) in 1755.

In fact, the Mar woods were not as easy to make a profit from as other pinewoods. They were simply too far away from major markets such as Aberdeen, and haulage was difficult as few roads were capable of taking wheeled transport. Only when the military road was built from Blairgowrie over to Deeside and on to Fort George in the aftermath of the Jacobite rebellion of 1745-6 did things improve – but not much. Logs from other Highland pinewoods, particularly along the Great Glen and the west coast, could be transported across lochs, but the Dee was always a tricky river to navigate.

Floating

Whoever was responsible for getting the timber out of the woods and to the markets faced a perilous task. There were natural pine and birch woods on both sides of the Dee from just above the Linn of Dee down to Allanaquoich, as well as large woods in the Glens. Until a sawmill was erected at the Beachan in the 1780s, all timber from these woods had to be floated or carried by land down the Quoich to the sawmill at Allanaquoich. The Derry and Luibeg timber was floated down the Lui between April and June, and September and November. There were also woods worth exploiting above the Linn of Dee.

1 Floating logs down the Dee would have looked similar to this nineteenth-century scene on the Spey - cold , hard work.





24 Logs passing through the Linn of Dee, 1786 - a particularly hazardous obstacle for the timber floaters to negotiate. (From an original drawing by Charles Cordner).

Most visitors coming to admire the spectacle of the Linn of Dee today would hardly imagine that such operations were attempted through this magnificent natural feature. The problem with the Dee was that in summer the water was too low and in winter ice, followed by massive spates created by sudden thaws, caused the timber to hurtle down the river. It was not unknown for logs to end up in the North Sea, if they weren't stolen on the way downstream. No wonder the Earl preferred to pass this risk on to others!

We know from accounts of floating on the River Spey that it was a hard and dangerous job, with workers constantly drenched in icy water. Heaving huge trees down to the water, fastening them together and steering them downstream was not a job for the faint-hearted. Take a walk up Glen Lui today and imagine the difficulty of keeping logs from grounding on the pink granite shingle bars that occur with every loop that the river takes across the glen floor. Even in high water, negotiating a log down this twisting, naturally shallow river would be difficult. Is it any wonder that an

essential part of the floater's pay was a share in a bottle of whisky each day, especially when you consider that the cost of that bottle was the same as a day's wages? This steady demand for the *uisge beatha* (whisky, literally 'water of life') would also have kept the illicit stills busy in the glens.

Over the years, several plans were devised for controlling the river. Big rocks were blown up and a dam was built in Glen Derry to help regulate the flow. However, even by 1806, floating remained a high-risk operation. An estate report of that year describes how 'in December last there came a thaw which swelled the Dee, that it carried away about 240 of the logs into the sea, and owing to the wind were cast ashore at Stonehaven'.

If that wasn't enough bad luck, the magistrates of Aberdeen took it upon themselves to claim salvage, selling the logs themselves. This was strongly disputed by the Earl of Fife, and other landowners along the Dee, who proposed taking the magistrates to court.

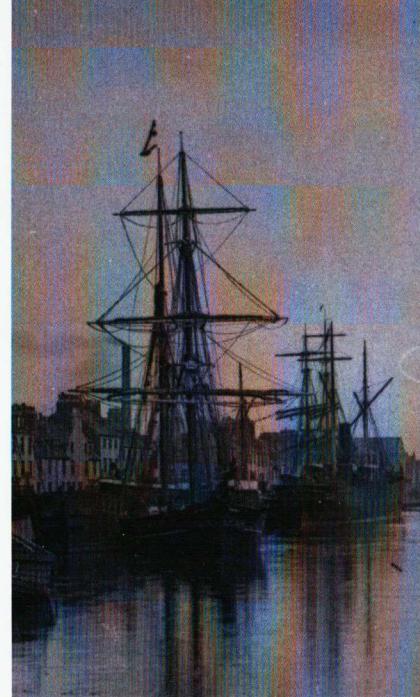
Bridges were often damaged, and occasionally destroyed, by out-of-control logs. Single logs caused the most bother and, when rumours of a possible ban on single log floating gained momentum in the 1790s, the 2nd Earl expressed concern about this, seeing it as 'an infringement upon the rights of every heritor [property owner] upon the Dee'. However, it

was not until 1843 that single log floating was finally banned and only rafts of logs allowed to go down the Dee. That it took such a long time to legislate against such a destructive practice is a powerful testimony to the influence wielded in parliament and elsewhere by landowners like the Earl of Fife. Fortunately a new form of transport soon provided a much less risky alternative to floating: the Deeside railway reached Banchory in 1853, and Ballater in 1866.

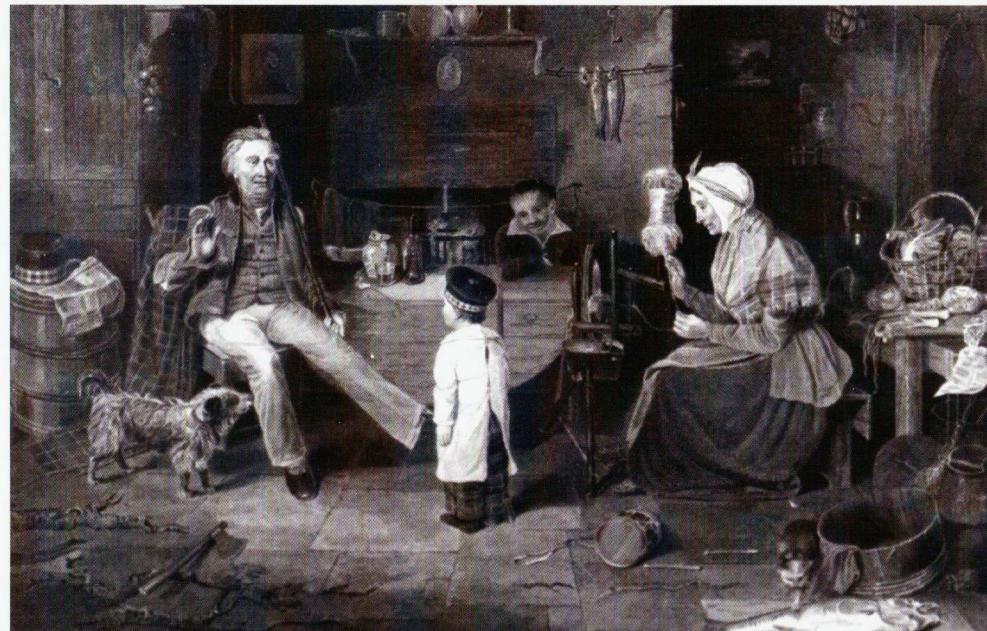
The Napoleonic Wars

The world was changing, as imperialism and industrialisation encouraged competition among the great powers and led to conflict within Europe. Even Mar Lodge was not immune to these global forces. The Napoleonic Wars broke out in the 1790s, bringing disruption to European trade, inflation and high prices for goods such as timber which could no longer be safely imported from the Baltic. Despite the threat to shipping, the Mar factor (estate manager) reported in 1801 that he did not expect to sell much timber that year ‘as merchants are in hope it will be imported in great abundance from the Baltic’.

Interestingly, two years later the 2nd Earl was telling a different story. He reported to the influential Society of Arts and Manufacturers that bridge builders ‘were so conscious of the superiority of the wood in my forest of Mar to foreign wood’ that they brought it fifty miles down the



25 Aberdeen Harbour c1878.
Much of the Mar timber was
exported from here.



26 The interior of a
Highland house, from a
19th century engraving
by A. Duncan, showing
the many uses of wood in
the house.



27 The Navy needed exceptionally straight pine timber for masts, but few Scottish woods could provide them.



28

Dee by land, even though the bridge in question was only a few miles from Aberdeen with its Baltic supplies. This may be the Earl trying to ‘talk up’ his timber and encourage business, particularly with the Navy. After all, no salesman ever suggests his product is inferior. However, if Mar pine was superior to foreign pine, then it was unique in Scotland.

In 1809, in an attempt to cash in on wartime scarcity and high prices, the Earl advertised the sale of 16-20,000 pine trees, which could be floated to Aberdeen from Mar at ‘a trifling price’. There was clearly still plenty of marketable timber in the Mar pinewoods, though the Earl was again reluctant to take responsibility for floating. In the end, the Aberdeen merchants didn’t bite and the bulk of sales that year turned out to be small parcels. The biggest – 1260 trees – was purchased by a Kirriemuir man.

But Mar pine was indeed sold to the Navy. The idea was first mooted around 1809 and samples were sent to Woolwich in 1814. At first the signs were promising and a Navy report suggested the timber was ‘at least equal in every respect, if not superior to the best Riga [Latvia] timber’. However, the factor was ultimately disappointed with the price offered, concluding it was not worth the expense. Mar timber was used in some Navy ships, but was ‘rather small for all purposes to ships of war’, being used instead for yards, jibs and ships beams.

Managing the woods

Regulations for woodland management were issued by the landowner from time to time. However, what that management should be in terms of ‘best practice’, to use the modern phrase, changed over time. For example, deer fences are a big issue for twenty-first century woodland managers, especially when establishing new woods. High deer numbers, rabbits and livestock mean that, if left open to grazing, young saplings can easily be nibbled to death. Deer fences are a common sight on Mar Lodge estate today, but they can kill birds such as the already-rare capercaillie and black grouse. However, step back 250 years in time and fences were unheard of – why keep deer out of their natural home? Pinewoods, it seems, were expected to regenerate without protective fences – as they always had done. Certainly pine is less susceptible to browsing than most broadleaved trees and deer numbers would have been less than today.

Cattle hooves expose soil for the small pine seeds to establish their first fragile roots, though cattle can also cause damage to growing trees, especially when sharing the ground with sheep. There was a long tradition of pasturing animals in Scotland’s woods and even in the hunting forests: given that rural folk were overwhelmingly dependent on livestock, such traditions would be difficult to break. The right thing to do was as contentious then as now.



29 Glen Quoich (background) meets the winding Dee – a landscape of woodland and open hill.

There were other ways to protect young trees. With a fairly high population in the Glens, there were plenty folk available to herd cattle and sheep, avoiding areas recently cut, at least until seedlings started to get quite tall.

This system appears to have worked, at least for a while. In the 1760s, the Derry and Luibeg woods, which had been cut over in the 1730s, were reported to be thriving. Indeed, they were again being assessed for future harvesting. The Earl and his managers seem to have understood the nature of pinewoods. They didn't clearfell large areas like today, but cut the best timber trees, leaving enough old ones to provide seed for the next generation. Instructions given by Lord Braco in 1753, stipulating that no tree under 18 inches diameter was to be included in a sale, also illustrates that some trees were left for another time.

However, not every wood flourished under this regime. In 1759 the pinewoods of Creagan Fhithich (east of Inverey) were reported as 'now almost cut out and not worth the pains of looking at'. By the 1760s other woods were showing signs of exhaustion. In 1761 there were problems with establishing birch regeneration in the Dalmore woods and six years later the expected pine regeneration behind Mar Lodge had not happened. An estate report in 1776 asserted that 'pasturage is fatal to the growth of young fir [pine]'. However, these reports were written during the so-called '**Thirty-Year War**', which centred on the impact of the use made of the woods by local farmers, including cattle grazing. As a consequence, some woods were to be enclosed with stone dykes to keep cattle out, though this wouldn't necessarily stop deer.

The 'Thirty-Year War'

This dispute between the Earl and the Farquharsons erupted in the 1750s, when the Earl was trying to cash in on his woods. He embarked on a lengthy legal battle to regain outright control of them. One of his concerns was that because 'these Highland fir woods gradually shift their stances', cultivation at their margins would prevent them naturally regenerating beyond the woodland edge. Interestingly, part of the deal involved the Earl giving up his interest in the Ballochbuie pinewood, in return for the recipient, Farquharson of Invercauld, relinquishing his rights in the other Mar woods. Having gained control of the whole pinewood of Ballochbuie, the Farquharsons agreed to sell the wood to an Aberdeen timber merchant late in the nineteenth century. It might have been devastated if Queen Victoria had not stepped in and bought the wood herself.



9

Unfortunately, so far as the trees were concerned, the 2nd Earl adored stalking deer. In 1780, he wrote to his factor, William Rose, about a hunting trip:

The heat is past description and I only desire my good fat Rose, that you will put yourself in my Situation, broiling over all these prodigious Mountains, from four o'clock in the morning till nine at night and coming home to my cottage, a habitation less than even the Cow-house at Montcoffer (his home in Banffshire). I never had more diversion, could I only have made it a little cooler.

He added that game birds were scarce, 'but I have plenty of Deer, so I care not much'.

By the 1790s, deer were abundant in both the hills and the woods. It was possible to see 100 stags on the Mar Lodge lawn in May. Perhaps too much was being asked of the woods – shelter for cattle, sheep (by then becoming more numerous) and deer, as well as timber for local use and profit. Something had to give, but the 2nd Earl was very keen that it shouldn't be the deer.

Fencing was seen as one answer, but not all the woods could be fenced – the cost would be enormous. The Derry, Lubeg and Quoich woods, which were more distant from Mar Lodge and still in reasonably good shape, were left open. Woods closer to home, which had not regenerated well and had gaps, were planted and fenced.



30

Dalmore House,
c1790, just prior to its
extension to three
storeys. From an
original watercolour by
Charles Cordiner.



31

Creag an Fhithich began its transformation from an old semi-natural wood to a plantation in the later eighteenth century.

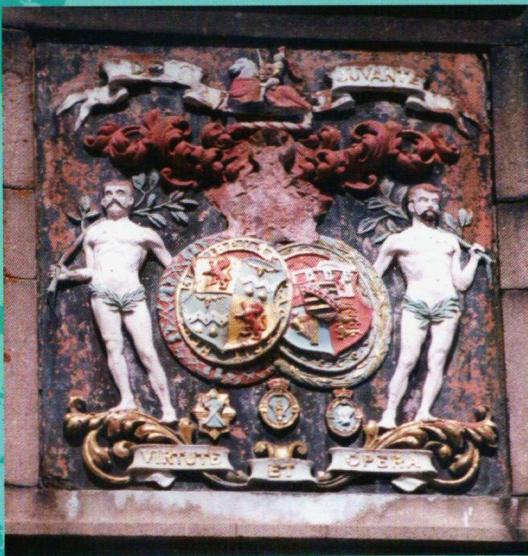
Early plantations

Though it was not unusual to plant exotic trees, a new type of planting became increasingly fashionable in the later half of the eighteenth century. This was not necessarily for profit, but for ‘beautifying of property and making policy about their (the nobility’s) houses’. Mar Lodge was no exception. The 2nd Earl was a keen ‘improver’ and initiated many changes on his estates. He embarked on a major planting programme on his Banffshire estate, for which he got a gold medal from the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, Manufactures and Commerce. At Mar, during the 1760s, he cleared the farms on the haugh (river meadow-land) around the newly named Mar Lodge (previously Dalmore House) to make way for parkland and to improve the view. By the end of the eighteenth century, the ‘pleasure grounds’ stretched from Linn of Dee to Linn of Quoich and various ornamental buildings were built to further enhance the landscape and views.

European larch, probably introduced to Scotland about 1650, became very popular and was often used to fill in ‘vacancies’ among the trees. In 1803, for example, the Earl enclosed 300 acres and planted 2000 young larch as a supplement to the natural regeneration of pine, birch, aspen and rowan, which were now flourishing thanks to protective measures. These early plantations were often a mixture of planted trees and natural regeneration, though birch, rowan and pine were also put in. In 1786 Creag an Fhithich, one of the earliest woods to show signs of decline, was interplanted with birch, rowan and larch. Whether all this planting was merely part of the beautification of the estate, or an attempt to replenish the woods so that they could continue to be worked for profit, is not entirely clear. It may well have been both.



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Developing a Sporting Estate

The Fifes had redesigned a nearby 'cottage' at Coriemulzie for their own use because the 'Muckle Spate' (Great Flood) of 1829 had damaged the original Lodge's main rooms. The original house was called Old Mar Lodge, while Coriemulzie became known as New Mar Lodge and was further expanded and redesigned at great expense in the following years. This also meant that the Fifes' former home could be rented out to 'nouveau riche' hunters.

There was probably never a time when hunting in the Forest of Mar did not take place. Lord Braco, when he bought the estate, may have spotted an opportunity to make some money from its woods, but he might simply have taken pleasure in owning one of the best deer forests in Scotland.

Developing the Forest of Mar as a sporting estate during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901) was not therefore a complete change of direction. However, it marked a period when hunting for deer and game birds became the principal activity on the estate, almost to the exclusion of all others, including farming and forestry. Hunting was no longer merely an aristocratic pastime but a serious commercial enterprise.

After the Napoleonic Wars timber slumped in price, along with wool. Renting out land to paying customers provided a lucrative alternative to sheep and trees. The 4th Earl moved with the times and, when the opportunity arose, he cleared or took farms 'in-hand', removing both sheep and people. By 1843 the last tenant farmer left the north side of the Dee, enabling the Earl to run the area entirely as a deer forest. The south side had already gone that way and ten years later was officially called 'the New Forest of Mar'.



12

Local people must have been used to hardship and shifts in estate policy. This time, change was intended to secure a playground, not only for the British aristocracy, but also for newly prosperous businessmen and factory owners, products of the British Empire, who viewed taking a lot of a sporting estate as a status symbol. This was especially true after 1852, when Queen Victoria's purchase of Balmoral offered royal neighbours just down the road.

Shooting parties flocked to Deeside in autumn. The gentlemen stalked thousands of deer and bagged hundreds of grouse, ptarmigan, blackcock and wood pigeon, while their keepers killed scores of eagles, peregrine, goshawk, crows and foxes which might prey on them. Meanwhile the ladies took carriage drives around the pleasure grounds, had picnics on the lawn and arranged dinners and balls in grand rooms festooned with the trophies of the chase, quite oblivious to the impact this lifestyle was having on rural life.

The Fifes offered compensation to those tenants they evicted, who, however, had no choice about leaving. The Government did step in, eventually, ordering an inquiry into the circumstances behind the clearance of people for deer, but they had left it rather late. In 1872, the 5th Earl's factor was ordered before the Government Committee set up to look into game issues. On being asked the reasons behind evictions on the estate, he responded: 'I do not know whether it was to make room for deer or not', which was hardly surprising considering that the events in question had taken place decades earlier. However, the estate's drive to encourage deer was having an effect and by the mid-1800s there was estimated to be between 7000 and 8000 in the Forest of Mar.

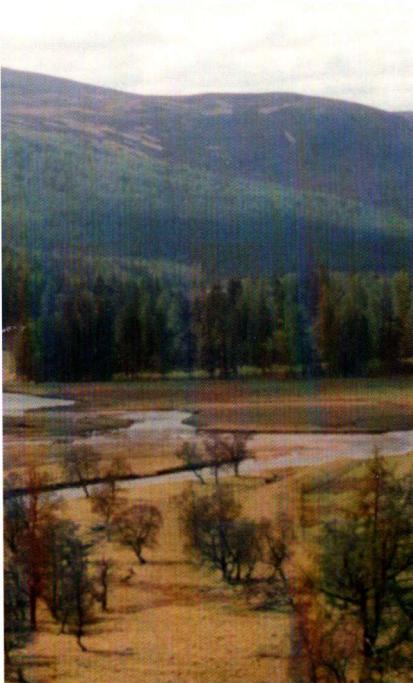


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The Victorians were ever keen on their trophies of the hunt, such as black grouse, and, of course, deer.



23



34 Though the plantations along the Dee are doing well, the birch in the foreground are clearly suffering from a lack of regeneration.

Developing plantations and new trees

Woods and trees were not entirely forgotten, but the focus turned from the old woods to new plantations. Planting appears to have increased as the nineteenth century progressed. Many newly introduced, exotic trees were established within the parkland and policy woods around Mar Lodge, designed to enhance the landscape by creating contrast with the natural beauty of the waterfalls, rivers and old woods. The choice of species probably depended as much on fashion as suitability to the harsh climate of a Cairngorms glen.

Larch and Scots pine were still the main plantation trees, probably chosen with an eye to timber value and deer shelter, and also for the colourful effect on the landscape that larch creates in spring and autumn. During the 1839/40 season, 25,000 trees were planted, mainly larch and pine, but also a few hundred spruce, beech and laburnum. The pleasure grounds were adorned with lime, horse chestnut and no less than ten types of maple and six varieties of elder – again probably for colour, but no doubt also for game cover.

Thirty years later, over 100,000 trees and shrubs were planted in a single year, mainly Scots pine, but also exotics such as Austrian pine, rhododendron, lilac and poplar. This was perhaps the Lombardy poplar, which was all the rage as an avenue tree, rather than aspen, our native poplar. Aspen had been planted in the previous century alongside other native trees like birch and rowan, but apparently fell out of favour in the Victorian era. As dykes were built for new plantations, self-seeding pine, birch, and rowan probably flourished alongside the planted trees, out of reach of hungry mouths.

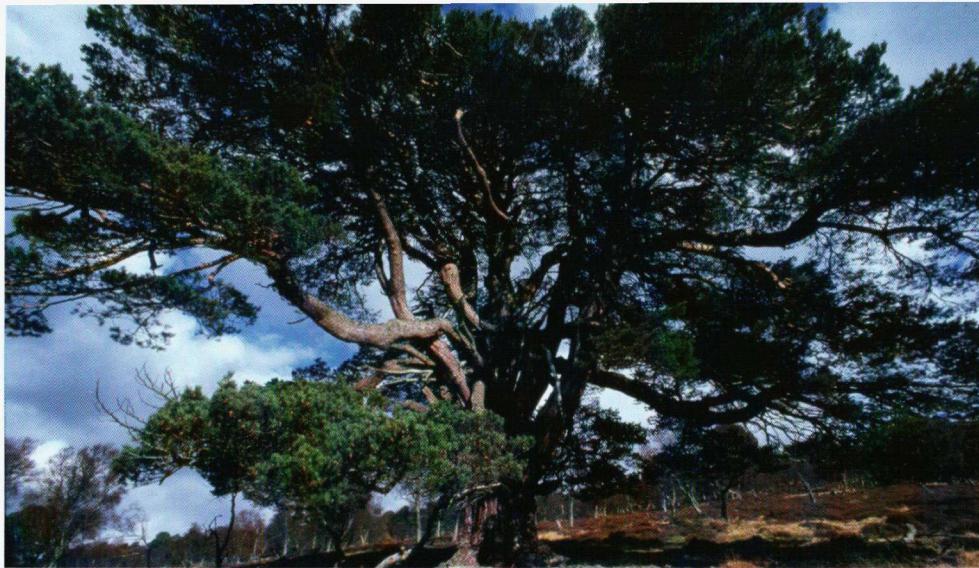
The landscape was changing dramatically. These new plantations thrived alongside the scattered old pine and birch which now clung precariously on to scree and crags. Most worryingly, up in the glens the much depleted, but still relatively compact, old pinewoods had stopped ‘shifting their stance’ (naturally regenerating across hillsides).

Declining woods

Timber was still being taken from these old woods, but continuing neglect, together with the intensive felling and grazing pressure they endured in the previous century, began to take their toll. The wood of Badiness (west of Little Inverey), which had been described in the mid 1700s as having ‘the finest trees in all Mar’, was reduced a hundred years later to a smattering of trees on Creag Bad an Eas (from which its name was derived). Meanwhile, to the east, two large enclosures were put up and planted, presumably with the usual mix of planted larch and pine, supplemented by natural birch, rowan and a new generation of



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36

A Mar 'granny' pine, at least 300 years old.

Badness pine. Other woods within sight of the Lodge, like those on Creag Bhalg were also enclosed and planted.

But the more distant woods remained open to deer. Where, less than a century before, there had been hillsides covered in young trees, only heather-clad slopes remained. Near Dail Gainimh, on the west side of Glen Lui, a 1761 survey found a hill of well-stocked seedlings aged from two to twenty years. A century later, no trees could be found. The youngest of the granny pines on Mar Lodge Estate is reckoned to be about 120 years old, implying that these woods had largely stopped regenerating by the 1870s. They survived only because of their ability to grow very old and probably because of their value as deer shelter, a situation that was to remain unchanged until the closing years of the twentieth century.

Living off the land

It wasn't only the landscape that was transformed in the nineteenth century; the entire way of life in these glens changed. Down through the ages Mar folk had lived and worked in a wooded land. They may have been farmers, but they also traded in wood. They depended on the trees to shelter their sheep and cattle, to keep a roof over their heads and provide some cash to keep them going when their crops failed and cattle starved.

One of the last attempts at timber speculation by a local man came to grief and probably heralded the end of this form of exploitation. Alexander Davidson, known locally as 'Rough Sanie' and more usually a poacher and smuggler, turned to a legitimate enterprise. Having



16



37

Inverey in the nineteenth century. The use of local timber is clearly still ubiquitous.

bought the rights to fell Derry wood, he is said to have remodelled the dam (the remains of which can still be seen today in Glen Derry) to ease the passage of the logs. The cost of this, however, far exceeded his calculations. To make matters worse, he then agreed to sell £200 worth of standing timber back to the Earl, who had decided that such a felling operation would harm the estate's amenities. Unfortunately the Earl was made bankrupt soon after and couldn't pay 'Rough Sanie' what he was owed. The final blow came with the 'muckle spate' (great flood) of 1829, which broke the Derry Dam and proceeded down the Dee, washing away all in its path, including the Mar Lodge dining room. This proved the ruin of 'Rough Sanie'. The Earl's fortunes eventually improved but traditional timber dealing had had its day.

Only two sawmills, at Allanaquoich and Delnabord (near the mouth of the Lui), survived into the nineteenth century, presumably in part because of the decline of saleable timber in the old woods before the plantations came to maturity. By 1851 there was only one sawmiller on the estate and three carpenters, compared with fifteen gamekeepers. Dyking, fixing fences and planting were still practised, but centuries of woodsmanship passed down through the generations was seeping away as the old families left or turned their hand to other occupations. Interestingly, a Mackenzie was employed to collect fir cones and plant trees in the 1820s. The family had all but disappeared and perhaps he was the last of the traditional woodsmen to employ his skills. For other families like the McHardys, who had been sheep farmers at Dalvorar, their great knowledge of the hills was diverted into tending deer instead.

Houses and bothies were built for the keepers and deer watchers, probably using locally milled pine and larch from the plantations. Other estate buildings and new lodges may well have used local timber, but by 1900 windblown wood was being used for building, fencing and firewood. By 1904 the sawmill was described as 'a great drawback', though it survived this difficult period. There was clearly little interest in maintaining the woods properly, probably because the 6th Earl, who had married a granddaughter of Queen Victoria and became the 1st Duke of Fife, had no need to profit from his woods. As one local later commented: 'there was nothing in his head but the deer'.

War, depression and neglect

The 6th Earl died in 1912, without a son to take over the estate. It passed to his daughter, Princess Alexandra, who, with her husband, Prince Arthur of Connaught, ran things as her father had done. No less than forty men and boys were employed to look after the deer.

During the First World War (1914-18), many woods were felled to provide pit props and trench walls, but the Mar Lodge woods managed to escape this fate. However, most of the estate's employees ended up in the trenches. Many would never return to Deeside. Those lucky enough to come back did not always want the same life as before. It could be a struggle, especially for the small farmers. Many left the Glen, some to the trades in Braemar, others to Aberdeen, Glasgow and England. But jobs were hard to come by during the Depression of the 1920s and 30s, and emigration became a serious proposition. However, some still wanted their old jobs as keepers and ghillies, complete with a house and a smart suit made in the Duke's tweed: in 1939 twenty hill staff were still employed on the estate.

The sawmill also continued in operation, an oil engine finally replacing waterpower when a new one was built at Allanaquoich in 1923. The heyday of selling pinewoods for profit was long over, but like many other estates in Scotland, Mar Lodge kept its sawmill to produce planks and boards for estate needs. The rash of planting in the nineteenth century kept it supplied, but as the factor admitted in the 1930s, there was 'no planting done on the estate for at least forty years'.



38 The war memorial in Braemar, commemorating local men killed in action.

The sawdust fusiliers

When the Second World War broke out, it seemed unlikely that the Mar woods would escape the wartime axe and saw a second time. Perhaps sensing that the woods were bound to be requisitioned, a Glasgow timber merchant wrote to the estate factor suggesting: 'there was a considerable demand for standing timber and it may be that the Proprietors will have to part with timber which they would otherwise prefer to keep'. In other words, if the estate sold their woods to him now, the estate would at least get something, whereas if they were requisitioned, they would not.

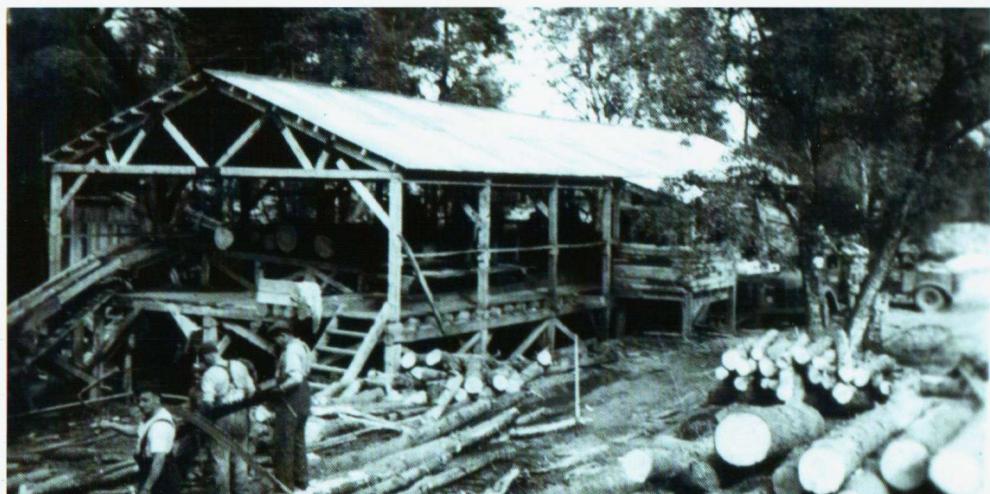
The Mar woods did, in fact, go to the war effort. In 1942 Unit 25 of the Canadian Forestry Corps arrived in Upper Deeside to log the Mar woods. Britain was under siege and, as with the Napoleonic Wars 250 years earlier, trade was disrupted. Timber, still mainly imported from abroad, was bound to be in short supply.

The lumberjacks were used to large-scale felling and extraction in the vast forests of Canada, using the most up-to-date methods. They brought their own equipment, often built their own camps and used their own felling techniques. The Scottish foresters put in charge of operations were in awe of their gear, marvelled at their building skills, but could not abide the way they left high stumps. Such a waste!

These wartime camps were in operation on Mar estate from 1942 until 1944 up in Glen Lui, in Mar Forest itself. By the end of the war the Canadians had cleared 700 acres of woodland, mostly the mature plantations but also some of the old woods. Not surprisingly, they started on the well-stocked plantations with easiest access and began clear felling, notably at Creag

39

Canadian timber camp during the Second World War.



Phadraig, Creag Bhalg and around Allanaquoich. Today, as you drive up the Glen from Braemar, there is an obvious line of trees near the top of the hills on the north side. It is said that the Canadians never quite got to the top of the timber line, thus leaving a scatter of trees. Local tradition also suggests that they cut out trees on Creag Bhalg so that the remaining ones formed a maple leaf to remind future generations that Canadians were part of the estate's history. On a winter's day with snow on the hills, you can just about see it if you use your imagination.

Given that most of the local men had gone to fight and any diversion in wartime was welcome, the Canadians were very popular at dances and whist drives held in the village hall. The unit had been mobilised in New Brunswick, one of the maritime provinces of eastern Canada, and many had Scottish ancestry. Indeed, they could even muster a pipe band and put on a display of Highland dancing at local events. The Forest of Mar was still awash with deer, and poaching, aided and abetted by the locals, helped keep these hardworking men in good health. They finally left in 1944, though some returned, having married local girls.

Yet again the woods had sustained heavy loss without replenishment. Even though the Mar glens would never see the same level of sporting activity, or the same number of gamekeepers, the deer numbers hardly diminished and the woods were again left in a state of neglect.



40 The arrival of the Canadian lumberjacks brought new felling techniques to Scotland and much activity in the Mar woods.



41 Deer and pinewoods can co-exist, as here on the RSPB reserve at Abernethy in Strathspey.

Changing fortunes

As the twentieth century progressed, many aristocrats were forced to sell off all or part of their estates as income from land continued to decline and death duties increased. In 1959, with the death of Princess Alexandra, the Mar estate passed to a nephew, Captain Ramsay. By 1962 it had been broken up. Mar Lodge and the lands north of the Dee were sold to two Swiss brothers, who ran it as an exclusive hotel and sporting playground for wealthy paying guests. Deer were still regarded as its greatest asset and, despite growing recognition of their natural heritage value, the woods grew older without new generations to replace the ancient trees.

But finally the trees received some attention. In the 1970s over 1200 acres of new plantations were established, this time partly made up from the new fast-growing conifers of North America, especially Sitka spruce and lodgepole pine, as well as Scots pine. Grants and tax incentives were easily available for creating regimented plantation blocks at the expense of the old woods. They would also provide good deer shelter when they grew up.

In 1989 Mar Lodge Estate was sold to an American millionaire. By then it was recognised that, from high top to glen floor, the estate supported some of Scotland's most precious habitats. Attention turned to the woods and the new owner was persuaded to try to halt the decline. Deer fences went up and young pines were planted. In 1994 over 700 acres of Creag Bhalg, the prominent hill behind Mar Lodge whose trees were felled by the Canadian lumberjacks, were fenced off and the woods allowed to regenerate.

The resurgence in interest in nature conservation and land ownership has sparked a debate in Scotland over who should own these national assets. However, the first attempt to buy the estate by a conservation consortium, including the World Wide Fund for Nature, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the John Muir Trust, failed to gain sufficient support. But finally, in 1995 The National Trust for Scotland successfully raised the funds to buy Mar Lodge Estate, including the south side of the Dee west from Inverey.



1995 – change and revival

Deer are still important to the new owners of the estate – they are, after all, our largest native mammal and one of the most attractive creatures that anyone will ever see in the Scottish Highlands. However, The National Trust for Scotland is shifting the balance in favour of the woods, which have not had much attention over the last few centuries. With the gradual reduction of deer numbers, young seedlings are appearing again through the heather – they're still in danger of being nibbled, but have a better chance of reaching a grand old age.

The Mar Lodge woodlands have witnessed almost 10,000 years of history, which is remarkable in itself. To begin with, they dominated the landscape, acting as home to a host of creatures from under the ground to the skies above the treetops.

42 Poised on the edge of the millennium, the Mar Lodge team look forward to protecting and enhancing the estate under their care.



43 Looking west up
Glen Dee, with
Mar Lodge
in the centre.

And humans, too, have been part of this story for thousands of years. To begin with they were content to live with what they found, but gradually they needed more space for agriculture and many of the trees came down. At the same time, they still looked to the woods to provide them with many of the necessities of life – fuel, building materials and cover for hunting. The people could not live without the trees, but they may have taken them for granted.

Thankfully, however, there have always been some woods on Mar Lodge Estate and it is hard to imagine this attractive place without them. We are lucky enough to have to endure nothing more strenuous than a pleasant walk in this ancient environment. But when you pass a 'granny' pine, pause a minute to think about what it has witnessed in its lifetime. Now you too have felt the past.

Book list

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- Steven, H.M. & Carlisle, A., *The Native Pinewoods of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1959)

